

THE PATH TO FOLLOW

Nº 22 VAYAKHEL PIKOUDEI

27 ADAR 5764 MARCH.20.2004

בס"ד

Publication
HEVRAT PINTO

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CHARITY AND SHABBAT: THE REMEDY FOR THE SIN OF THE GOLDEN CALF

(by Rabbi David Hanania Pinto שליט"א)

Moses assembled all the congregation of the Children of Israel and said to them, "These are the things that the L-RD commanded, to do them: On six days, work may be done, but the seventh day shall be holy for you, a day of complete rest for the L-RD; whoever does work on it shall be put to death. You shall not kindle fire in any of your dwellings on the Sabbath day" (Ex 35:1-3).

For what reason did Moses, after having summoned all the assembly of the Children of Israel, speak to them first of the mitzvot of Shabbat, rather than the other commandments? As we have seen, he spoke to them about this several times before. Since G-d first commanded them to construct the Tabernacle, why does Moses mention the laws of Shabbat before those concerning the construction of the Tabernacle?

The reason for this was because the sin of the golden calf affected the oneness of the Holy One, blessed be He. In proclaiming, "Here are your gods, O Israel," the Children of Israel demonstrated that they believed in several divinities, even renouncing the entire Torah. To this effect, commenting on the verse that states, "If you err and do not perform all of these commandments" (Num 15:22), the Talmud explains that the person who renounces idolatry recognizes the entire Torah, and the person who recognizes idolatry acts as if he renounces the entire Torah.

Moses summoned the entire assembly of the Children of Israel in order to shelter them under the wings of the Divine Presence and to make them rediscover the faith that they had lost because of the sin of the golden calf. He immediately prescribed them to observe Shabbat, a day that had been blessed by G-d, as it is written, "G-d blessed the seventh day and sanctified it" (Gen 2:3), the observance of which even constitutes the foundation of our faith. For, as we have seen, the one who strictly observes Shabbat atones for his sins, even if he worshiped idols (as with the generation of Enoch).

Shabbat is equal to all the other mitzvot (Yerushalmi Berachot 1:5), and its observance corrects the sin of *Avodah Zarah* (idolatry; but literally "strange service"), for all service is forbidden on Shabbat.

Moses made the Children of Israel understand that the construction of the Tabernacle and the Sanctuary would spiritually elevate them, transform them into a miniature sanctuary, and imbue them with the Shechinah. He explained to them that the *תרומה* (offering) that they had made would rectify their renouncing of the Torah (כי תנורה [40]) that had been given to them at the end of 40 days (Menachot 99b).

As we have seen (Zohar I:52b), the evil inclination – the taint of the serpent – had abandoned them with the giving of the Torah, but had reintroduced itself to them after the sin of the golden calf. Moses therefore explained to them that they could only uplift themselves through the mitzvah of Terumah, of charity, as it is written, "Charity will uplift a nation" (Pr 14:34). Only *tzeddakah* was able to repair the sparks of holiness that had been affected by the stain of the serpent. The offerings given for the construction of the holy Temple – the place where the Shechinah resides – wipes out the power of klipah and ends the effect that renouncing the entire Torah has, for charity is equal to all the mitzvot (Bava Batra 9a).

The charity that one gives therefore makes the Divine Presence reside in the midst of collective Israel and brings the Final Redemption closer (ibid. 10a), as it is written, "Zion will be redeemed through justice, and those who return to her through *tzeddakah*" (Isa 1:27).

Moses also prescribed the mitzvah of Shabbat before that of the construction of the Tabernacle to make us understand that, even if one has not earned anything, one must give charity. If the weekly Torah portion of Terumah follows immediately after the precepts concerning Shabbat, it is to encourage us to give charity as soon as Shabbat ends (or Sunday morning) without waiting longer. Each one will give what he can, according to the blessings that G-d has granted him (cf. Deut 16:17). As it is written, "You shall surely give him, and let your heart not feel bad when you give him" (ibid. 15:10).

After having answered the prayers of His children and acknowledged their sentiments of gratitude, G-d made them undergo the trial of money to see if their love for Him was truly unselfish (see Perkei Avoth 5:19), like the love of the Patriarchs. In regards to this, and concerning the verse that states, "You shall love the L-RD your G-d will all your heart ... and all your possessions," the Talmud states, "even if He takes away your possessions" (Yoma 82a).

This is what happened during the sin of the golden calf. The Children of Israel took advantage of the riches that they had acquired. Moses therefore prescribed that they take from their riches an offering for the Eternal, encouraging them in this way to make use of their silver and their gold for the construction of the Tabernacle and for charity.

Finally, the sin of the golden calf creates a stain on the holy Covenant, namely sexual perversion (cf. Tanhuma Ki Tisa 20 on Exodus 35:6). As we know, the one who strictly observes the Brit is included in G-d's holy assembly. The three first letters of the verse that states, "He devoured wealth, but will disgorge it" (Job 20:15) form the Holy Name *ChaBO* (not to be pronounced) that rectifies the sin of the Brit. Because of the ו and the י of ויקרה (whose numerical value, 16, is thus equal to the Name of G-d, יהי [with the Kollel]), one enters into the category of קהיל (the holy assembly) and we rectify the Covenant.

Moses explained to the Children of Israel that one can, through the observance of Shabbat and giving charity, repair the sign of the Covenant, for Shabbat also carries the name "Brit", as it is written, "The Children of Israel shall observe the Sabbath, to make the Sabbath an eternal *Brit* [covenant] for their generations" (Ex 31:16). Shabbat and charity are equal to all the mitzvot (Bava Kama 9a), and it is the same with the Covenant, as our Sages teach (Nedarim 32a). In regards to this, we can see the same lesson in the following note written by the Admor of Ger on the tractate of Nedarim: "All the Divine precepts [kol mitzvot Hashem] have the same numerical value as '*Brit*' (612)".

The essential is to fear G-d. In this way, one will look to continually correct oneself, to acquire virtues, and to assemble (*vayakhef*) every good trait.

IN MEMORY OF THE TZADIKIM

REB YITZCHAK GVRIZMAN

Reb Yitzchak Gvirzman, fondly known as “Reb Itzikel”, came into the world on Tevet 12, 5642 (1882) in a tiny village near Gerlitz. He was the son of Rabbi Naphtali Elimelech Gvirzman and his wife, Rebbetzin Hannah Brendel. On his father’s side he descended from an impressive line of rabbanim. They tell that his grandfather, Rabbi Avraham Gvirzman of Gerlitz, was a Tsaddik Nistar (a hidden Tzaddik). Even with his most insignificant remarks (for example, when he was bringing cheer to young newlyweds), a careful observer could notice that by his words he implied something much more, and in this way he went about his Divine service. Rabbi Chaim of Tsanz said of his student, Rabbi Avraham Gvirzman, that he didn’t know what it meant to sin, and that he was as innocent as a one-year-old child.

The day of his Brit Milah, his father gave him the name Yitzchak in memory of the Tzaddik of Lublin. His uncle, the Shinover Rebbe, added to him the name of Moshe (in memory of Moshe Rabbeinu, who risked being drowned in the Nile) because his mother had difficulty during labor, and only the prayers of the Tsaddik of Shinov saved him. The child thereby received the name of Moshe Yitzchak.

Still very young, he distinguished himself by his exceptional behavior and his kiddusha. They tell that Rav Avraham Chaim Horovitz, who noticed the child when he was 8 years old, asked, “Who is this child? The Shechinah illuminates his face!”

A little afterwards, his family left Gerlitz to go live in Shinov. The child lived almost constantly at the residence of his uncle, the Shinover Rebbe. One day, as he was playing in the Beit Midrash (as young children do), he went to hide under the Tallit of his uncle. This happened during the Mincha service before Shabbat, and the Shinover Rebbe began the repetition of the Amidah. When the child heard the voice of the Rebbe trembling and seeming to shoot out flames, he was overcome with such fright that he ran away and didn’t dare approach his uncle for days.

In the year 5654 (1894), at the age of 12, his uncle sent him to study in Tama with Rabbi Moshe Apter. On the 12th of Tevet 1895, the child celebrated his Bar Mitzvah. However his Tefillin weren’t quite ready, and he put on those of his uncle. Years later, Reb Itzikel recounted just how much he was moved by this, and affirmed that he would never again have the courage to thoughtlessly put on the Tefillin of the Rebbe. On that same day he was engaged to Rachel, the daughter of Rav Issachar Dov Hacohen Glanz from the city of Shinov, who himself descended from an illustrious family of Rabbanim. On the 6th of Tevet 5659 (1899), the Shinover Rebbe left this world. Reb Itzikel was then 17 years old, and he spoke of his uncle until his dying day.

On Rosh Chodesh Nissan 1899, a few months after the passing of his uncle, the marriage of Reb Itzikel and Rachel his betrothed was celebrated. During that period of time, he didn’t stop elevating himself in purity and holiness, fasting several days in a row and studying Torah day and night.

On the 9th of Av 5674 (1914), the WWI broke out. Cities in Poland and Galicia were turned into battlefields. Russian soldiers chased the Austrian army before them, attacking Jews everywhere as they went. The Cossacks were renown for their cruelty. The city of Shinov suffered terribly from the invasion and was almost completely destroyed.

One day, while Reb Itzikel was reciting the Amidah in his basement (which had a door granting access to the street), his daughter Bilah came down to see him. Suddenly she saw a Cossack yelling and demanding something from her father, who then calmly pursued his prayers. The Cossack, engaged with anger, prepared to stab the Rebbe from behind. She let out such a scream that the Cossack himself got scared and bolted as fast as he could to save himself. During this period, Reb Itzikel decided to leave Shinov and settle in Pshevorsk. There he began to keep an open house during Shabbat and holidays. The Chassidim flocked to him.

Unfortunately, in 1930, while Reb Itzikel was away on a trip, a terrible fire destroyed more than 50 Jewish homes in Pshevorsk, including the home of Reb Itzikel, the Beit Midrash of the Chassidim, and the only printing house in the town.

On the 16th of Elul 5699 (1939), WWII broke out. On Rosh Hashanah 5700 (1939), the Nazis seized Pshevorsk and put the splendid synagogue there to the torch, but not before profaning the Sifrei Torah found within. That same year, on the day after Yom Kippur, the Jews were chased from the town and forced to escape to Russian territory. They managed to do so on the eve of Sukkoth, arriving in the Russian village of Ulshitzza (which had a Jewish majority population). Reb Itzikel lived there for about seven months, until his exile to Siberia.

During the winter of 1940, the Russians proposed to all the inhabitants of Galicia, as well as to all the refugees fleeing the German advance, that they receive Soviet citizenship. Of course, everyone asked what the best thing to do was. Reb Itzikel ordered his Chassidim to in no way sign up.

One Shabbat evening in June 1940, Russian government agents raided all the Jewish homes in Galicia and, equipped with their list, made everyone who had refused Soviet citizenship leave their homes in the middle of the night. They were all brought to the closest railway station, where trains awaited to bring them to Siberia. These exiled people realized just what an enormous calamity had fallen upon them because of the decree. Despite all this, Reb Itzikel maintained that such a day could only bring good, since it was that day, long ago, that the decree of Haman had been annulled and that the Jews had escaped his clutches. Nobody understood Reb Itzikel. However one year later, in 1941, the Germans invaded all of Galicia and sent all those who had escaped exile in Siberia to a certain death.

As for them, the Jews exiled in Siberia suffered terribly from hunger, cold, and all sorts of imposed labor. However most of them ended up escaping. Thus they understood what Reb Itzikel had told them: “The 23rd of Sivan is a favorable day for Israel!” After the war, the Polish government requested that Russia liberate all the Polish citizens that it had retained on its territory.

During the month of Iyar 1946, Reb Itzikel began his voyage home. The train ride lasted several weeks, and upon his return in Poland he settled in Breslau (in Silesia). Yet there was no mikveh there, nor Beit Midrash, and Reb Itzikel oftentimes spent several weeks in Krakow, where he finally settled in Elul 1947.

It was in Krakow that something extraordinary happened. Often he would stay up for the entire night studying in the “Ezrat Nashim” of the Beit Hamidrash. During the night of the 8th of Nissan, he stayed up and began to study, as was his habit. Then, in the middle of the night, he decided to take a look at the Gemara about which he was about to do the Siyum (conclusion) in the morning for the memory of his father z”l. He sat down, and at that exact moment a bullet passed just over his head. Reb Itzikel had barely escaped death. After an investigation, it later turned out that that a non-Jewish neighbor living in front of the Beit Hamidrash couldn’t stand to see this Jew studying all night, and his vehement anti-Semitic hatred was so great that he decided to kill him.

Reb Itzikel stayed in Poland until 1949. He later settled in Paris and lived there until 1957, then in Antwerp, where he stayed and spent the last years of his life. He left this world on Yom Kippur 5737 (1976). Reb Itzikel had three daughters and one son-in-law.

At the funeral of Reb Itzikel, tens of thousands of people from around the world hastily arrived and squeezed together to attend the service. Each had in his heart memories of the piety and saintliness of this extraordinary being, a man whose miracles, wonders, and exceptional manner – a manner that allowed him to serve the Holy One, blessed be He, by constantly being attentive to the least detail – would require several books to recount.

THE MORAL OF THE STORY

REMEMBER SHABBAT

A teaching from the Maguid of Dubno

Moses assembled all the congregation of the Children of Israel and said to them, 'These are the things that the L-RD commanded, to do them: On six days, work may be done, but the seventh day shall be holy for you, a day of complete rest for the L-RD' (Ex 35:1-2).

The Holy One, blessed be He, said to Moses: Gather a great assembly and explain to them the Torah in public, and the laws of Shabbat on Shabbat.

One concludes from this that Moses instituted the custom of giving lessons at the time of the subject: The Halachot of Passover on Passover, those of Shavuot on Shavuot, etc. On a given holiday, the laws of that same holiday were elucidated.

Why did the Biblical text put so much emphasis on Shabbat and the holidays? Be it to praise them, or to protest that we don't observe them sufficiently, it is a question pertaining to these more than any other mitzvot. With regards to what else do we speak of remembrance and observance as we do for Shabbat? Not only that, but the desecration of holy days is aggressively condemned, as for example in the following verse: "My soul detests your New Moons and your appointed times; they have become a burden upon Me" (Isa 1:14).

The Maggid of Dubno explains this to us with a parable.

A man left his family en route to a distant country. When he finally arrived, he waited impatiently for news about his hometown, yet nobody from there ever passed by. One day a beggar showed up and the man immediately recognized him as being from his city. He was overjoyed at his arrival and wanted to hear all the news that he could possibly relay to him. The poor man, however, responded, "Why are you delaying me? I came here for my livelihood, so don't make me lose any precious time."

"How much do you think that you'll be able to collect here?" the man asked.

"Two or three gold pieces," replied the beggar.

"Here are three gold pieces. Stay here with me!"

He therefore stayed at the man's home and began to recount everything that had happened

to the man's family. The beggar had hardly begun to speak, however, when drowsiness took a hold of him.

"Since I've found here a place where I can rest," the beggar told himself, "I'll ask the man of the house to give me a bed to sleep a little!"

His host, however, became angry. "If I relieved you from all your work today, it was only for me – so that you could inform me of how my family was doing! Why, for goodness' sake, would you go to bed now?"

The Holy One, blessed be He, gave man a privileged soul, a soul whose origin was from under the Throne of Glory, and that in man finds itself far from its natural environment. Every day of the week, even though the Holy One, blessed be He, yearns to hear good news on its part, man is occupied with his business. This is why He gave us Shabbat; it is in order that He may rejoice with us. On Friday, we receive our sustenance for two days in order that Shabbat finds us free of all our worries and ready to rejoice in G-d's closeness and love.

"For six days you will work": You may occupy yourself with everything that concerns your body, but the seventh day is a rest in honor of Hashem your G-d. That day should be devoted solely to Hashem, Who granted us this rest in order to rejoice with us, not to see us lounging around in bed or giving ourselves over to other personal activities. It is this that is a "day of complete rest for the L-RD."

EISHET CHAYIL ROSH HODESH

1. Women are not obligated to recite Hallel on Rosh Chodesh.
2. Women do not recite Kiddush Ha Levanah (Blessing on the New Moon).
3. Some women are accustomed to not working on Rosh Chodesh. They have particular merit because Rosh Chodesh was granted to women as a holiday.